

PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON



A FEW NOTES ON PLANT NAMES.

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-ISMA Names Are Neuter.

The recent transfer, incorrectly spelled, of a considerable number of names to the genus *Syntherisma* calls attention to the fact that this genus, though neuter, is treated by most writers as if feminine. The same is true of other genera ending in *-isma*, and *-sma* generally; in fact, Greek nouns ending in *-μα* are regularly neuter. A few illustrations, taken at random, will suffice,—all being neuter and taking the definite article  $\tau\acute{o}$ : *άλισμα*, a water plant; *ανάγκασμα*, compulsion; *ἄνθισμα*, a multi-colored dress; *κιθάρισμα*, music for the cithara; *λάκρισμα*, something torn; *μέλισμα*, melody; *σφράγισμα*, a seal; *ψιθύρισμα*, a whisper. In this category belong such generic names as *Aphanisma*, *Chylisma*, *Pholisma*, *Syntherisma*, and *Xolisma*, all of which are neuter; hence, for example, we should say *Syntherisma sanguinale* and *Xolisma ferrugineum* rather than the customary *S. sanguinalis* and *X. ferruginea*.

An apparent exception to this rule is the *-osma* names, such as *Glycosma*, *Rutosma*, *Synosma*, *Thamnosma*, and *Xanthosma*, which are sometimes treated as neuter but are really feminine,—the original Greek ending being *-ῆ*, not *-α* (from *ἡ ὄσμη*, odor); hence, for example, we should use *Thamnosma montana*, not *T. montanum* as it is customarily spelled.

RANUNCULUS ACRIS L., *Sp. Pl.* 554. 1753.

ERIGERON ACRIS L., *Sp. Pl.* 653. 1753.

The original spelling of these specific names is still generally adhered to, although in the third edition of *Species Plantarum* *Erigeron acris* was changed to *E. acre*. It is sufficiently obvious that these names should be written *Ranunculus acer* L. and *Erigeron acer* L., respectively.

DESMODIUM BATOCAULON A. Gray, *Pl. Wright.* 2: 47. 1853.

MEIBOMIA BATOCAULIS (A. Gray) Kuntze, *Rev. Gen.* 1: 197. 1891.

*Meibomia* is the accepted generic name under the American Code.

The above species is a highly palatable and valuable forage plant of the woodland-oak types of Arizona and it is desirable that its name be properly spelled. Dr. Gray's specific name was Greek; Dr. Kuntze has made it a hybrid—neither Greek nor Latin. The Latin form, of course, would be *baticaulis*, but an arbitrary change from a Greek to a Latin form is certainly unwarranted. The suffix *-caulon*, to be sure, is not Attic Greek, the word for *stem* (cognate with Latin *caulis*) being ὁ *καυλός*, though there are related diminutives, *καυλείον* and *καυλλον*. It is customary to regard these *-caulos*, *-caulon* specific names as adjectives, the feminine form of which would be *-caule*. Clearly, therefore, the proper spelling of the name of this leguminous plant under the American Code is *Meibomia batocaule* (A. Gray) Kuntze.

DYSSODIA Cav. *Descr. Pl.* 202. 1802.

Two things are evident as regards the form of this generic name: (1) that Cavanilles published it as spelled above, and (2) that, until very recently, American botanical writers have almost universally spelled it *Dysodia*. That the etymology is from the Greek *δυσωδία*, a foul smell, seems sufficiently obvious—more especially in view of Cavanilles' comment (*op. cit.*): " \* \* \* llamada allí vulgarmente *Ruda* por su mal olor." The double s obscures the etymology and is a patent misspelling. Asa Gray was thoroughly justified in deliberately dropping one s from this name in *Syn. Fl.* 1<sup>2</sup>: 355. 1838, and it is only a most rigid interpretation of priority that can set his action aside. *Dysodia* is the orthographically correct form of this name.

#### *On Certain Priorities.*

The U. S. Department of Agriculture, in rejecting duplicating plant binomials, took a fine forward step towards a reasonable rapprochement between the American and International Codes. By a sort of tacit understanding, moreover, certain other concessions to good taste and propriety have been pretty generally adopted maugre priority pure and simple; examples of this sort are shown in the use of *Washingtonia* for the palm instead of umbellifer genus; in the admissibility of the rather irregularly published *Sequoia washingtoniana* (= *S. gigantea* Dec., not Endl.) *vice* *Sequoia wellingtonia*; in the use of *Toxylon*, instead of *Ioxylon*, for Osage-orange, and so on. The writer feels that the action indicated exhibits and presages a safe and healthy tendency in American botany. He believes the time is ripe for those following the American Code to consider seriously classification and possible adoption of certain groups of desirable conserved names, and (in *Bul. Torr. Bot. Club* 53: 157-160. 1926) has proposed one form of departure from pure priority. May I suggest another line of departure from *nomina priora* that might well be considered? That is, that names which are *obviously and completely unscientific* be rejected? Botany is a science; as far as it is a *science*, therefore, it must of necessity hold no brief for what it *knows* to be wholly false and untrue. Under such a ruling *Asclepias syriaca* L. would be rejected in favor of *A. cornuti* Dec., and *Simmondsia chinensis* (Link) Schn. would not be permitted to oust *S. californica* Nutt.